

# CHRB NEWS & REVIEW

NEWSLETTER OF THE CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD

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## CTHF SERVES RACETRACK WORKERS

**By Mike Marten**  
**Editor News & Review**

Any organization thinking of setting up a large healthcare plan should take a good look at the California Thoroughbred Horsemen's Foundation program, which serves backstretch workers throughout the state.

CTHF provides health, dental, and vision care and other vital services to thousands of stable workers and their families.

Remarkably, last year CTHF handled more than 10,000 patient visits on

a budget of just \$2.3 million, operating from its two clinics at Bay Meadows and Santa Anita Park and referring some patients to outside providers.

There is no other racing organization in the United States that offers as many services to eligible backstretch workers and their dependents as CTHF, a non-profit foundation regulated by the California Horse Racing Board and administered by a volunteer Board of Directors and salaried chief executive officer, Peter Tommila.

Funding comes from a variety of sources, principally from a portion of

uncashed pari-mutuel tickets (\$1.57 million last year), as authorized by state law. The other \$660,000 for the CTHF budget came through the generosity of horse racing's charitable foundations, horsemen's organizations, racetracks, and fairs.

Unfortunately, funding for this vital program is a little bit shaky nowadays. Tommila explained that Advance Deposit Wagering, which began in 2002, has been cutting into CTHF funding because winning bets placed through

**(Continued on page 8)**

## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**O**ur principal focus in this issue of News & Review is the California Thoroughbred Horsemen's Foundation, a non-profit group that provides free healthcare to thousands of racetrack workers.

CTHF is principally funded from a share of uncashed pari-mutuel tickets, as authorized by state law, and donations from the industry. No other racing jurisdiction has a comparable program. CTHF is simply the best.

We also devote space in this issue to security and veterinary issues surrounding the Breeders' Cup at Santa Anita Park on October 25 and to the new White Horse Award that honors heroes in our industry.

When I came to California in 1994, many things impressed me about California horse racing. They still do, especially the good things being done by the industry for the backstretch community.

There's the excellent work being done by the Winners Foundation to help workers overcome problems. And, being familiar with all of the major racing jurisdictions, I can state flatly that the recreational programs provided for racetrack workers in California are second to none.

*I continue to be amazed at the generosity of racing charities and racing associations, particularly Oak Tree, which donate millions of dollars each year to these and other worthwhile causes.*

*We established News & Review in 1995 to report positive stories that don't often get told in the mainstream news media, and through the years we've been pleased to publish numerous articles on these excellent programs.*

*We are honored to promote in our newsletter some heroes of the California horse-racing industry – those involved in the Breeders' Cup, those nominated for awards, and those providing healthcare to backstretch workers.*

*As a former horseman and a lifelong supporter of horse racing, I am proud of the many benefits provided to the dedicated men and women who work so hard caring for our wonderful equine athletes. I thank them for being there for all of us, and I applaud the generosity of all who support these true heroes of racing.*

*Roy C. Wood, Jr.*  
Roy C. Wood, Jr.



## IN THE GOLDEN STATE

# RTCA AND OAK TREE TO HONOR BACKSTRETCH WORKERS DURING BREEDERS' CUP WEEK

*Leigh Gray, whose heroism extends both on and off the racetrack, is a Southern California nominee for the new White Horse Award, which honors racetrack and racing farm workers who perform heroic acts. This report from Ed Donnally, a former jockey who is now with the Race Track Chaplaincy of America, provides details on the nominees and related activities.*

The Race Track Chaplaincy of America in conjunction with Oak Tree Racing will present the first White Horse Award at Santa Anita's Seabiscuit Court on Thursday, October 23, two days before the \$14-million Breeders' Cup World Thoroughbred Championships.

Given to the one backstretch or racing farm worker judged to have performed the most heroic act on behalf of human or horse, the annual award will be presented during a special White Horse Heroes Luncheon.

"I think the award is a wonderful idea," said D.G. Van Clief Jr., president of Breeders' Cup Ltd. and vice chairman of the NTRA. "I think it will become a point of pride for a group of unsung heroes who live and work in racing 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

At the suggestion of Sherwood Chillingworth, Oak Tree's executive vice president, October 23 will be designated as "National White Horse Heroes Day" by the RTCA.

The organization is working with its 45 chaplains, who serve at 70 tracks and training facilities nationwide, to coordinate corresponding luncheons at other tracks operating that day.

TVG recently announced that it will telecast the presentation ceremony live, paving the way for track workers around the nation to have lunch and view four of their peers being honored at Santa Anita.

"We have long considered the Chaplaincy one of the most effective programs around to aid backstretch workers," said Chillingworth. "And the National White Horse Heroes Day is a good example of their concern for our workforce. Oak Tree has long been known as an innovator and I think it appropriate we help launch this effort."

Oak Tree and RTCA are also planning special promotions

that day at Santa Anita and are combining forces to produce a video salute to backstretch workers that will be shown nationally.

Award nominees include:

♦ Charlie McKay, a groom who rescued six horses from a Woodbine barn fire that destroyed 32 thoroughbreds last summer. He ignored warnings about his own safety and entered a barn engulfed in flames, then went stall to stall evacuating horses;

## CALENDAR

### OCTOBER

- 1 – Fresno fair meet opens.**
- 23 – CHRB monthly meeting in Monrovia.**
- 25 – Breeders' Cup at Santa Anita Park.**

### NOVEMBER

- 5 – Golden Gate thoroughbred meet opens.**
- 11 – Hollywood Park thoroughbred meet opens.**

### DECEMBER

- 4 – CHRB monthly meeting at Los Alamitos.**
- 26 – Santa Anita thoroughbred meet opens.**
- 26 – Los Alamitos quarter-horse meet opens.**
- 26 – Cal Expo harness meet opens.**
- 26 – Golden Gate thoroughbred meet opens.**

◆Roosevelt “Heavy” Robinson, a Philadelphia Park paddock valet and backstretch worker who pulled a female driver from her burning auto. Robinson used his strength to extract a woman who was trapped behind the wheel of her smoking vehicle. Moments later the auto was completely engulfed in flames;

◆Fred Lewis, a 68-year-old assistant starter who crawled beneath Saratoga’s starting gate to pull to safety another assistant who was pinned beneath an upside down, thrashing thoroughbred; and

◆Leigh Gray, a former Southern California exercise rider, was working as the foot person on the carriage that carries the Santa Anita patrol judges to their trackside stands when exploding firecrackers spooked the four-horse team, causing the driver to be thrown to the track. While the panicked team raced toward the starting gate, Leigh crawled over the back and pulled the team to a stop.

But Gray’s real heroics began when the two-time breast cancer survivor went to work as a veterinary technician for the Southern California Equine Foundation. There, she convinced surgeons to perform pro-bono surgeries on severely injured horses with the stipulation that she do the aftercare at her seven-acre ranch and find them good homes. To date, she has rescued and placed 112 thoroughbreds, over half of whom she said had been scheduled for euthanasia.

The winner will receive a cash award, a special bronze White Horse Statue, and other donated prizes. The top four nominees will earn all-expense paid trips to the Breeders’ Cup, be made available to the press, and attend the various



**LEIGH GRAY IS AMONG THE HEROES nominated for the inaugural White Horse Award.**

related functions. The feature race that day will be named in their honor, and the White Horse Award winner will present the trophy.

The final four and winner will be selected by members of the White Horse Fellowship, a group comprised of 18 organizations and individuals who have demonstrated their care and concern for racing’s workforce by donating \$10,000 for each of two years. Among them are the Oak Tree Racing Association and Californian Gary Biszantz.

“You’re doing a wonderful thing,” said Laura Hillenbrand, author of *Seabiscuit, An American Legend*, “I love the idea of the White Horse Award. It is much needed and much overdue.”



## COMINGS AND GOINGS AT THE CHRB

Jennifer Rhode, office technician at the Sacramento headquarters office, transferred to the Department of Justice. She came to the CHRB from private industry in 1999.

Erica Anderson, racing license technician at Sacramento headquarters, transferred to the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control. She came to the CHRB in 2001 from private industry.

Rita Menard is the new racing license technician at Bay Meadows. She is new to state service, coming from the horse-racing industry in Kentucky.

*Articles and photographs appropriate for CHRB News & Review may be submitted to Mike Marten of the CHRB staff:  
12235 Beach Blvd., Suite 7  
Stanton, CA, 90680.  
(714) 890-7004,  
fax (714) 890-7006.*

*Please help us enforce California’s racing rules.  
Call (800) 805-7223 to report any violations.*

# THE EQUINE PRESCRIPTION

FROM THE DESK OF THE CHRB  
EQUINE MEDICAL DIRECTOR



**DR. RON JENSEN**

The Breeders' Cup championship races are the highlight of the racing season and are televised to millions of viewers throughout the world. A comprehensive effort is made to help make the running of the Breeders' Cup races as safe as humanly possible.

Every autumn the Breeders' Cup organization brings together a team of regulatory veterinarians to assist the resident regulatory veterinary staff during Breeders' Cup week. With the Oak Tree Racing Association hosting the event this year at Santa Anita Park, the Breeders' Cup veterinary team will be working with CHRB and Oak Tree official veterinarians.

The team routinely consists of regulatory veterinarians from California, New York, Kentucky, and Great Britain. Historically, many of the horses entered in Breeders' Cup races are from these areas and/or have raced at tracks in these jurisdictions. Therefore, members of the team have knowledge of the horses and are aware of the veterinary medical history of the horses as well as any peculiarities the horses may have. Not only do they have knowledge of the horses, they are also acquainted with the trainers and handlers of the horses. This proves to be helpful in communicating with the trainers and their staff when reviewing and discussing evaluations of the horse.

In addition to the regular team members, a veterinarian from the Texas Racing Commission will join the team this year because Breeders' Cup 2004 will be held at Lone Star Park in Texas. By working as part of the team at Santa Anita, the Texas Racing Commission veterinarian will be gaining valuable Breeders' Cup experience.

The team spends the week leading up to the Breeders' Cup races evaluating the health and racing soundness of the horses. They inspect the horses, observe them as they do their track work, and review their past records. Following the end of training hours, the team members meet and review their observations made during the morning. They also prepare

records of their observations. If any of the team members have observed anything they feel is unusual about a horse, it is reviewed and evaluated with the full team and with the trainer.

Like all horses on any race day, Breeders' Cup horses on the championship day undergo routine pre-race inspections.

Breeders' Cup horses are observed by a member of the veterinary team in the receiving barn, in the saddling paddock, during the post parade, and at the starting gate. During the running of the races, the team members are available to provide assistance to the official veterinarian in the event of a racing accident. In addition, practicing veterinarians are located at the two horse ambulances to also provide veterinary assistance if there is an accident.

More horses competing in Breeders' Cup races are subjected to post-race testing than are rou-

tinely done. CHRB rules require that the horses finishing in the first three places in stakes races with a purse over \$75,000 be subjected to post-race drug testing. Superfecta wagering is conducted on all of the Breeders' Cup races. Therefore, horses finishing in the first four places will be tested.

Although the Breeders' Cup team is very active and helpful during Breeders' Cup week, the CHRB and Oak Tree veterinarians remain in charge of all veterinary activities, and CHRB rules and regulations concerning veterinary matters and drug testing are in force.

It should also be noted that the American Association of Equine Practitioners provides for all televised races, including the Breeders' Cup, a "media-trained" veterinarian who is made available to the live television broadcasters to discuss and explain any racing accident or injury that might occur.

Although the Breeders' Cup team is very active and helpful during Breeders' Cup week, the CHRB and Oak Tree veterinarians remain in charge of all veterinary activities, and CHRB rules and regulations concerning veterinary matters and drug testing are in force.





# BE OUR GUEST...



***The California Horse Racing Board believes the best way to regulate an industry is to be fully informed. The CHRB regularly solicits input from the public and the horse-racing industry, and this guest editorial page is one more forum for that purpose.***

*This guest editorial was submitted by Cliff Goodrich, former president of Santa Anita Park and current president of Arlington Park, who between those posts served two years as interim chief executive officer of the California Thoroughbred Horsemen's Foundation.*

When contacted, I agreed to write this guest editorial because I considered it a privilege to work with the many dedicated individuals and organizations associated with CTHF. It was an honor to help them regain their financial footing and their place as a respected organization that provides essential services to the deserving backstretch workers in the horse-racing industry.

I walked into an operation that had lost \$750,000 for two consecutive years and hadn't been profitable in a decade. About 75% of CTHF's historic funding has come from a percentage of winning unclaimed tickets. However, the statutory authority is tied directly to on-track, live handle on the live product. As everyone knows, because of off-track wagering, account wagering, etc., the live wagering at every track in America has plummeted over the last 15 years or so. This was a growing cause of CTHF's financial problems. The financial problem was exacerbated by double-digit increases in healthcare costs.

Short term, we trimmed senior management staff and some clerical positions. But the most important change was the adoption of principles and policies that would allow us, and others, to better understand the business and demonstrate that we knew what we were doing. For example, we instituted pre-approval practices for all patients. No more would we allow patients to choose the doctor or dentist of their choice. If patients wanted CTHF to pay a majority of their medical and dental bills, they had to go through CTHF before seeing a doctor. We became a "gate-keeper" much like an HMO.

We also reduced the number of professionals we would send our patients to see in order to receive deeper discounts in exchange for a greater volume of patients. Extra efforts were made by me to "have some fun" with the CTHF family and let them know that this was really a simple business and all we were doing was attempting to help people the best we could every day.

By far, the most helpful long-term solution was to create, in effect, a partnership with the racetracks and horse-

men. The Thoroughbred Owners of California (TOC) and all thoroughbred tracks were extremely helpful in supporting CTHF, once they clearly understood what our problems were. A program was started to have a portion of the purses from one race per meet matched by each track, as permitted by a section of statute never before utilized. And tracks dug more deeply into their charity foundations to help CTHF. These programs combined made a huge difference in the revenue contributed to CTHF annually.

When I left CTHF in December 2002 the projected revenues were expected to reach nearly \$2.5 million, after falling below \$2 million before these solutions were implemented. The CHRB was extremely helpful along the way (e.g., increasing the administrative expense "cap" to 15% from 10%).

It was a great team effort. I certainly did not do it alone. Credit the TOC, especially John Van de Kamp, as well as the track executives Jack Liebau (Magna), Joe Harper (Del Mar), Sherwood Chillingworth (Oak Tree), and Rick Baedeker (Hollywood Park). These are the people who put CTHF "back on the map."

It also goes without saying that the remaining employees at CTHF, led by Noble Threewitt, are dedicated professionals who really do care about improving the quality of life for backstretch workers all over California.

CTHF's biggest challenge is to maintain the relationships and trust established with the TOC, CHRB, and all racetracks. Without a change in statute, CTHF cannot reach sufficient revenue numbers to properly care for the backstretch workers. And with healthcare costs only expected to rise, more money will be needed in the future. I feel CTHF needs to bring in some business leaders with an appreciation for racing who will bring with them a network of people and financial resources to tap a whole new audience.

CTHF is unique in thoroughbred racing. It treats race-track workers with the dignity they deserve. I am confident the best is yet to come.

# All Aspects of Security Enhanced for



**Chief Dave Hinig**  
**Arcadia Police Dept.**



**Capt. Bob Sanderson**  
**Arcadia Police Dept.**



**Chief Dick Honaker**  
**Santa Anita Security**



**Robert Nieto**  
**CHRB Inv. Chief**



**Michael Kilpack**  
**CHRB Supervising Inv.**

*Law enforcement authorities at local, county, state, and federal levels have been meeting for months to develop a security plan for the Breeders' Cup.*

*Chief Dave Hinig of the Arcadia Police Department, in charge of this massive undertaking, told the others during one planning session, "At the end of the day I want us to look at each other and say our work was boring."*

Other key people in the overall security plan include Capt. Bob Sanderson, the go-to guy at the Arcadia Police Department, and Dick Honaker, the security chief at Santa Anita Park.

California Horse Racing Board investigators will focus primarily on security in the stable area, led by the CHRB's Southern California chief, Robert Nieto, and supervising investigator Michael Kilpack.

The three stewards for the Breeders' Cup program are Pete Pedersen, Ingrid Fermin, and Tom Ward, who all have worked at previous Breeders' Cups in California.

Other CHRB personnel on the security team include Dr. Ron Jensen, the Board's equine medical director, and John Reagan, the CHRB senior management auditor.

The goal, Hinig explained, will be to provide maximum security for the public attending the Breeders' Cup and related events without being overly intrusive and "achieve a balance between a high-profile presence and a friendly attitude."

Hinig said high priority is being given to traffic control on Breeders' Cup day with assistance from police officers in neighboring communities, the California Highway Patrol, and Caltrans. He said patrons will be moved as quickly as possible through the scanning devices that will be in place at all entrances to the racetrack.

"The earlier we get people inside, the less stressed they are going to be due to the heightened security measures," said Hinig. "We are advising people to plan your day and come early, that way you are going to minimize the impact of traffic congestion and additional security measures for screening."

Parking lots will open at 7 a.m. and entrance gates will open at 7:30, well before the scheduled 9:40 start of the first race on the program.

California racetracks always have been cooperative with the CHRB on matters of security, reassigning their own security personnel to work with CHRB investigators

# Breeders' Cup at Santa Anita Park

when necessary. This cooperative effort has been stepped up for the Oak Tree meet. Beginning with the opening-day program September 28, Honaker assigned personnel to work with CHRB investigators to provide enhanced security in the stable area. The numbers will increase as the Breeders' Cup approaches.

"We'll have 24-hour security in the quarantine area (where foreign horses are stabled) and at the specially designated Breeders' Cup barns as they become occupied," said Honaker.

Kilpack's investigative staff at Santa Anita will be augmented by Nieto and CHRB investigators from Los Alamitos on Breeders' Cup day.

"As always, we will be strictly enforcing security requirements for the stable area throughout the Oak Tree meet and on Breeders' Cup day," said Kilpack. "Guards are checking everyone at the gates – pedestrians and those in vehicles. CHRB licenses and other identification badges need to be worn in plain view. No one is being admitted who does not belong there."

A Breeders' Cup veterinary team will be working with the CHRB and Oak Tree official veterinarians during the entire week leading up to the Breeders' Cup races evaluating the health and racing soundness of the

horses. If any team member observes anything unusual about a horse, it is reviewed and evaluated with the team and with the trainer. (Additional details on this aspect of the security plan and on increased drug testing for the Breeders' Cup are provided by Dr. Jensen in a separate article in this publication.)

As for the security of the pari-mutuel system, new procedures and safeguards have been added since the last Breeders' Cup to ensure the highest degree of integrity to the wagering system, according to Reagan, who will be closely monitoring the situation.

Pedersen, with more than 50 years in horse racing, has served as a steward at all five previous Breeders' Cups in California (1984, 1986, 1987, 1993, and 1997). In that 1974 inaugural Breeders' Cup, he and fellow stewards Alfred Shelhamer and Hubert Jones disqualified horses in the Juvenile Fillies and Classic.

Ward, with 35 years of experience as a racing official in California, will be officiating his fourth Breeders' Cup.

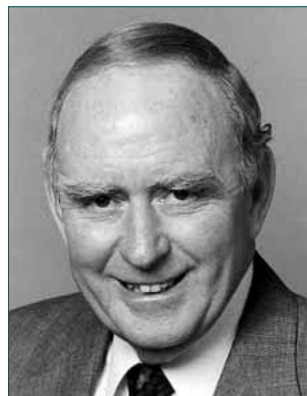
Fermin has been a racing official since 1977 and a steward on the Southern California thoroughbred circuit for the last 13 years. This will be her second Breeders' Cup.



**John Reagan**  
**Sr. Mgmt. Auditor**



**Dr. Ron Jensen**  
**Equine Med. Director**



**Pete Pedersen**  
**CHRB Steward**



**Ingrid Fermin**  
**CHRB Steward**



**Tom Ward**  
**CHRB Steward**



Internet and telephone accounts are automatically paid, so there is no such thing as an uncashed ticket in account wagering. In other words, no more lost tickets, no more winning-ticket souvenirs for those betting through ADW accounts. And that means less money for CTHF.

“We need to find alternative sources of funding, such as more aggressively going after private donations,” said Tommila. “Individual contributions are almost nil. They totaled just \$150 last year. That is not acceptable. It’s time for



**MEDICAL ASSISTANT VERONICA NOLASCO, shown here with Laura Lopez, is part of the full-time staff at the CTHF Santa Anita facility.**

**(Benoit & Associates photo)**

individuals in the horse-racing industry to give back and to help the health and welfare of backstretch employees.”

Interestingly, in contrast to the current state of affairs, CTHF was founded through the generosity of individual donors, according to Noble Threewitt, the 93-year-old trainer who helped establish the organization about 40 years ago and has served as its unpaid president ever since.

“In a way, the whole thing actually got started in my barn,” explained Threewitt. “A groom’s mother was sick and he didn’t have anywhere else to turn. I had a soft spot then and I guess I still do, so I borrowed money to get him out of trouble.

“Cecilia Harper, along with some other horse owners who were very interested in the welfare of people on the backside, heard about what I did and wondered if we could provide this type of assistance in a more organized way through the California Horsemen’s Benevolent and Protective Association (HBPA). We went to the private community for funding. We held dances and this and that to raise money. It just all grew

from there, and the program got bigger and better all the time. It’s unbelievable what we do now.”

## PROVIDES MANY SERVICES

Today, CTHF, which eventually became independent of the HBPA and that organization’s successor, the California Thoroughbred Trainers (CTT), offers a full range of healthcare to workers and their immediate families. The organization also provides some financial aid, social programs, and free clothing.

Under the supervision of CTHF’s medical director, Dr. Andreas Subadya, several medical doctors work rotating hours and days at both clinics. There’s also a full-time dentist and an optometrist who comes in every other week, and even a cardiologist who visits twice a month at Santa Anita. The Bay Meadows facility provides similar dental and optometry services either on-site or through referrals.

To be eligible for CTHF service, a worker must hold a current CHRB license. Eligible workers may use the on-track facilities as soon as they are licensed by the Board. Workers and their eligible dependents receive most services free of charge. The co-pays for some dental work are minimal, just \$5 for adults and \$3 for children. Workers pay \$20 for complete eye examinations and glasses.

“We don’t want to shift any more of the cost to workers,” said Tommila. “They couldn’t afford it. Higher fees might force some of them to go out into the neighboring communities to emergency rooms at county hospitals and such, which would place an extra burden on taxpayers. But most of them would just put off seeing anyone, so their medical conditions would just get worse and worse.”

“He’s right,” offered Threewitt. “Some of these people wouldn’t go outside of the racetrack for healthcare. Whatever their reasons, they just wouldn’t do it.”

## GOODRICH STEPS IN

CTHF’s financial situation was even more precarious a few years ago. But fortunately for CTHF and backstretch workers, Cliff Goodrich, former president of the Los Angeles Turf Club (Santa Anita Park), was between jobs and available for some rescue work.

Goodrich, a brilliant, master organizer with plenty of contacts in the horse-racing industry, put all of his talents to work as he convinced racetracks and fairs, horsemen, and charitable foundations to donate additional funds to bridge the gap between CTHF expenses and revenue. He lowered administrative costs, and he rewrote the contracts with medical personnel to reduce those costs. (See the Guest Column in this newsletter for insight from Goodrich.)

**(Continued on page 10)**



# SOLIS FAMILY: TYPICAL CTHF CLIENTS

Manuel Solis had a rash on one arm. He didn't know how it got there. When you work all day grooming horses, cleaning stalls, and doing odd jobs around the barn, things just happen.

Just to play it safe, Solis walked over to the medical clinic operated by the California Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association at Santa Anita Park. He got right in. They treated the rash with salve and told him not to worry about it. Then the 44-year-old groom went back to work.

That was all there was to it. No drama. No serious problem. Just routine medical care provided free of charge to a member of the California horse-racing community.

It's the same for Manuel's four brothers – Juan, Francisco, Carlos, and Ecequid – and their father, Pablo. Between them they have 166 years of experience grooming horses at Southern California thoroughbred racetracks. These men, their wives, and their children all have received free medical care from CTHF at one time or another.

Manuel's eldest son, 18-year-old Daniel, had a complete medical examination at CTHF before he enlisted in the Navy. His 16-year-old son Elvis also had a check-up before participating in sports at Rosemead High School. And 11-year-old Manny received his vaccinations at CTHF before starting the 6th grade. Moreover, CTHF provided the medical care, either directly or through referrals, for Manuel's wife, Maria, when she delivered the first two boys, and CTHF helped them apply for Medicaid for the third. Again, it didn't cost Manuel a penny.

Manuel did not always go to CTHF for free medical care. A proud man, he insisted on paying his own way when he first came to Southern California in 1976. But after he married Maria and they started a family, he could no longer afford to pay for dental work, eye exams, and medical care – not on top of the rent for their El Monte apartment, automobile costs, food, and all of his other expenses.

"It's tough to pay for all of these things," said the neat, soft-spoken man as Maria, Elvis, and Manny sat near him at the table in the CTHF conference room, all quietly listening. The two boys followed the example of their father, polite and attentive.

"Somehow I manage," continued Manuel. "I've always worked extra jobs. When someone ships a horse to the track for one race, it's too expensive to send a groom along. They know me. They ask me to take care of the horse. I never say no to work. When I have breaks from my (regular) job, I take care of the other horses. And lately I've been helping the racetracks to clean stalls when the horses move."

Manuel and Maria recited a long list of occasions when



**MANUEL AND MARIA SOLIS and their sons Manny (far left) and Elvis appreciate the vital healthcare services they receive from CTHF.**

their boys needed medical care. There was the skateboarding accident when Daniel had a gash in his right arm that required stitches. And Elvis needed that dental work. All totaled, they figured their family might have received CTHF services more than 40 times over the last 20 years.

We asked about their neighbors in El Monte – those who do not work in horse racing nor receive care from CTHF. What do they do when they have medical problems?

"A lot of them borrow from their families," answered Manuel. "They make loans. When someone in the family gets hurt or sick, they do what they have to do."

We wondered about non-emergency situations. What about routine medical and dental check-ups?

"They just don't do it," said Manuel. "They don't see the doctor or the dentist until things get serious."

After a pause, Manuel said there was something important he wanted to say, something he had been thinking about for days in advance of the interview.

"When you don't have anything, this is a lot," he said in a humble, reverent voice, extending his arms, palms up, with a sweeping motion to encompass the entire CTHF facility. "This is why we agreed to the interview – because of what they have done for us."

"We really want to thank Mr. Tommila and everyone else. We want to thank whoever has made it possible."



By the time Goodrich left CTHF last year to become president of Arlington Park, the organization was struggling back to its feet. And they didn't need to look very far to find a replacement to keep things going in the right direction.

"I picked out Pete (Tommila) a long time ago as the right man for the job once Cliff left," explained Threewitt, who helps oversee the CTHF on policy issues but leaves the day-to-day operations to the chief executive. "Pete is smart and has lots of enthusiasm. I got him on board as a consultant about a year ago. When Cliff left, everything fell right into place. Pete is tickled to death and he loves the job."

## RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB

Tommila has worked in the horse-racing industry since 1962. About the same time that Threewitt and the horse owners were putting together a healthcare program in California, Tommila was grooming horses at racetracks in New England. He eventually became a racing official, first as assistant racing secretary at standardbred tracks back East, then at California harness meets in the 1970s. When a job opened in

the judge's stand at Los Alamitos in 1979, Tommila made the switch and remained a CHRB steward until he accepted the CTHF position.

During his years as a steward, Tommila led a second, less public life as a pre-licensed marriage, family, and child counselor (MFCC). During his off hours, beginning in 1991 he took courses in psychotherapy and MFCC at Trinity College of Graduate Studies for degrees in counseling psychology and pastoral counseling. This led to counseling work at Pathways Counseling Service in Buena Park and volunteer service at the California Youth Authority in Norwalk and Concern Counseling Services in Fullerton.

"For the last three years, I was the case manager for pregnant women at a homeless shelter in Los Alamitos," said Tommila. "When harness racing shifted from Los Alamitos to Sacramento, the transfer made things difficult. I would drive home to Los Alamitos on Sundays, then drive back to Cal Expo on Wednesdays."

We wondered why a man who had spent his entire adult life in horse racing and attained the respected post of CHRB steward had suddenly switched focus to a seemingly unrelated career in counseling and healthcare.

"The collapse of harness racing," he answered. "When harness racing shifted from Hollywood Park to Los Alamitos, we lost much of our fan base. It wasn't unusual to see a crowd of 20,000 on weekend nights at Hollywood Park. We never saw crowds of that size at Los Alamitos. Things did not look very promising, so I began looking for a career option.

"I was going through a divorce in 1988, and I needed personal counseling. That experience gave me the idea of becoming a counselor myself. I could create pluses out of big minuses and make the most out of bad situations.

"I prefer this line of work," continued Tommila, an understated man with a gentle grace and a baby face that belies his 61 years of age. "I'm more comfortable helping people than meting out discipline. My character traits make me better suited to working one-on-one with people to improve their lives than to punishing them.

"Even while I was a steward, I did what I could to help licensees. For example, I utilized my counseling skills to provide assistance to those experiencing substance abuse. That was the part of the job that I really enjoyed.

"My original goal was to become executive director of a shelter, but everything fell into place for this job. I don't think the progress in the career change could have been any better."

Tommila led a tour of the clinic at CTHF, introducing physicians and staff: Laura Lopez, dental receptionist; Dr. Linda Roselle, full-time dentist, assisted by Mary Silvestro and Grace Vera, hygienist; Monica Inda, medical receptionist; Edgar Rosales, nurse director; Angela Valverde, accounts



**DENTAL PATIENT JUAN ALVAREZ receives care from Dr. Linda Roselle at the CTHF Santa Anita facility.**

**(Benoit & Associates photo)**

payable and client records; Dr. Sam Chia, general practitioner; Dr. Antonio Ong, general surgeon; Dr. Wayne Hoeft, optometrist, and his assistant, Elida Pineda.

Staff not at the clinic that day include Dr. Gary Conrad, cardiologist; Dr. Salvador Sotomajor, general practitioner; and Dr. Shital Arya, pediatrician.

“At Bay Meadows, we are very grateful and fortunate that CTHF services are coordinated and outreach is provided by Charlie Dougherty and Terry Houghton of the CTT,” said Tommila. “Our part-time professional staff includes two general practitioners, Drs. Josefina Enriquez and Denise Gonzales, and two dentists, Drs. Kevin Low and Whitney Lorenz.

In addition to Threewitt, the Board of Directors includes Leonard Dorfman, thoroughbred trainer; Doris Johnson, thoroughbred owner; Mike Ames, bank examiner; Lynda Ross, Sacramento lobbyist for Kaiser Permanente; and Dr. Ralph Steiger, medical advisor.

The Advisory Board includes two thoroughbred owners, Jon Kelly and Geri Forrester; Dr. Rick Arthur, racetrack veterinarian; and Bob Bean, thoroughbred trainer.

## EVERYONE PITCHES IN

Turning to the budget, Tommila explained how CTHF could handle more than 10,000 patient visits for \$2.3 million, which comes out to about \$230 per visit. That’s a remarkable average when you consider the wide range of care provided, some of it quite extensive. One patient underwent open heart surgery at a local hospital. Another had his knee replaced.

“To begin with, our medical staff works below scale,” explained Tommila. “Everyone is more interested in helping people than in making money. Their interest in the backstretch community is their main purpose in being here.

“Excellent contracts also help us contain health costs. For example, we pay a very low fee to Methodist Hospital here in Arcadia for any surgery. We have similar contracts with Centinela Hospital in Inglewood and Lifelong Medical Clinic in Berkeley.

“We’ve just signed a nice contract at reduced rates with Western Dental, so now our people have the option of going to any of 150 regional dental offices.

“And the pharmaceutical companies are very generous in supplying us with samples of their medicines at no cost. The pharmaceutical companies are unsung heroes in this program.”

CTHF does not handle workers’ compensation injuries.



PETER TOMMILA

Those patients are referred to the appropriate insurance companies. CTHF also keeps costs down by screening patients for alternative coverage. If someone is eligible for Medical, Medicare, or Health Families (children program), CTHF refers him or her to the other program.

“But that’s a small number we send elsewhere,” said Tommila. “Mostly we take care of our own. We’re providing services to our uninsured population and removing that burden from local government and the state.

“When I look out in the reception area and I see the children, and I realize that the work we do helps them remain healthy and strong, that’s the

real reward. That’s the real satisfaction.

“We have other, non-medical programs,” he added. “For example, we work with the Winners Foundation to provide the majority of funding for workers they send to rehabilitation clinics to deal with substance abuse.

“We hosted a back-to-school program. About 900 young students came to Santa Anita on August 28 for haircuts and back-to-school clothes. This is a tremendous social program for the needy people in the community, and it has tremendous value for Santa Anita, in my opinion. Years from now when these children and their parents remember the haircuts and clothes, they won’t necessarily remember the CTHF or even the Foothill Unity Program, which put the whole program together. But they will remember going to Santa Anita.

“One area I would like to look further into is preventive medicine through education. And I would like for our track kitchens to work with us by providing more nutritious menu items.

“But to accomplish all of this, we need help from the racing industry,” said Tommila. “The foundations and organizations, the horsemen, fairs, and racetracks, they all got behind Cliff and helped us through a difficult period. But that’s not enough. We need help from individuals if we are going to fully meet our mission of improving the quality of life for the stable workers who are the backbone of our industry.”

Threewitt concurred. “It would be a real shame to let things slide now, after all these years,” he said. “There’s no other state in the union that has anything like this – not New York or anyplace else. I think it’s a great honor for California to have this program, a great honor for everyone in this industry to know that we are doing something for the people who need our help the most.”





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